DARK MOON RISING
BATMAN
and the MAD MONK
4
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MATT
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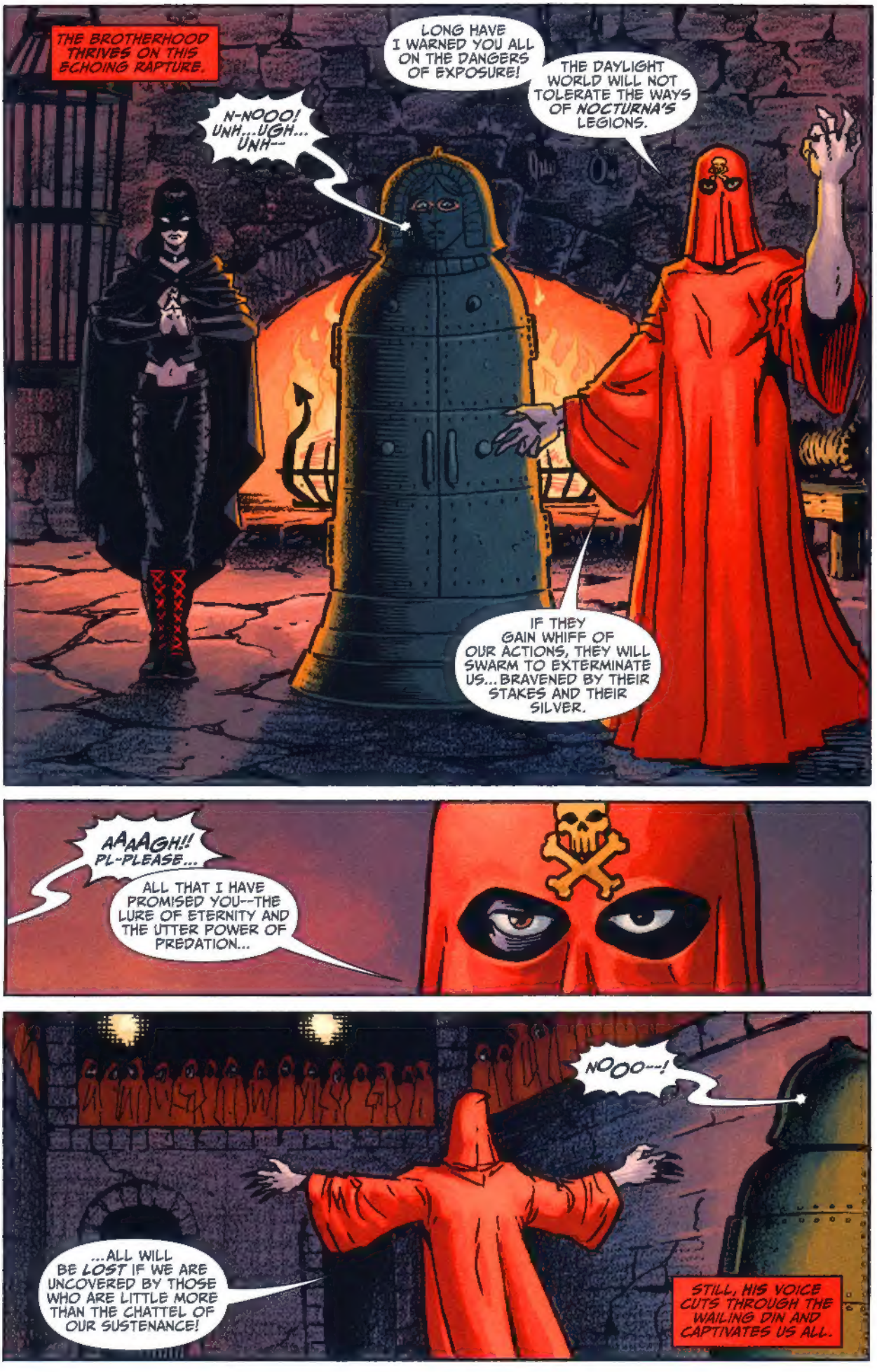
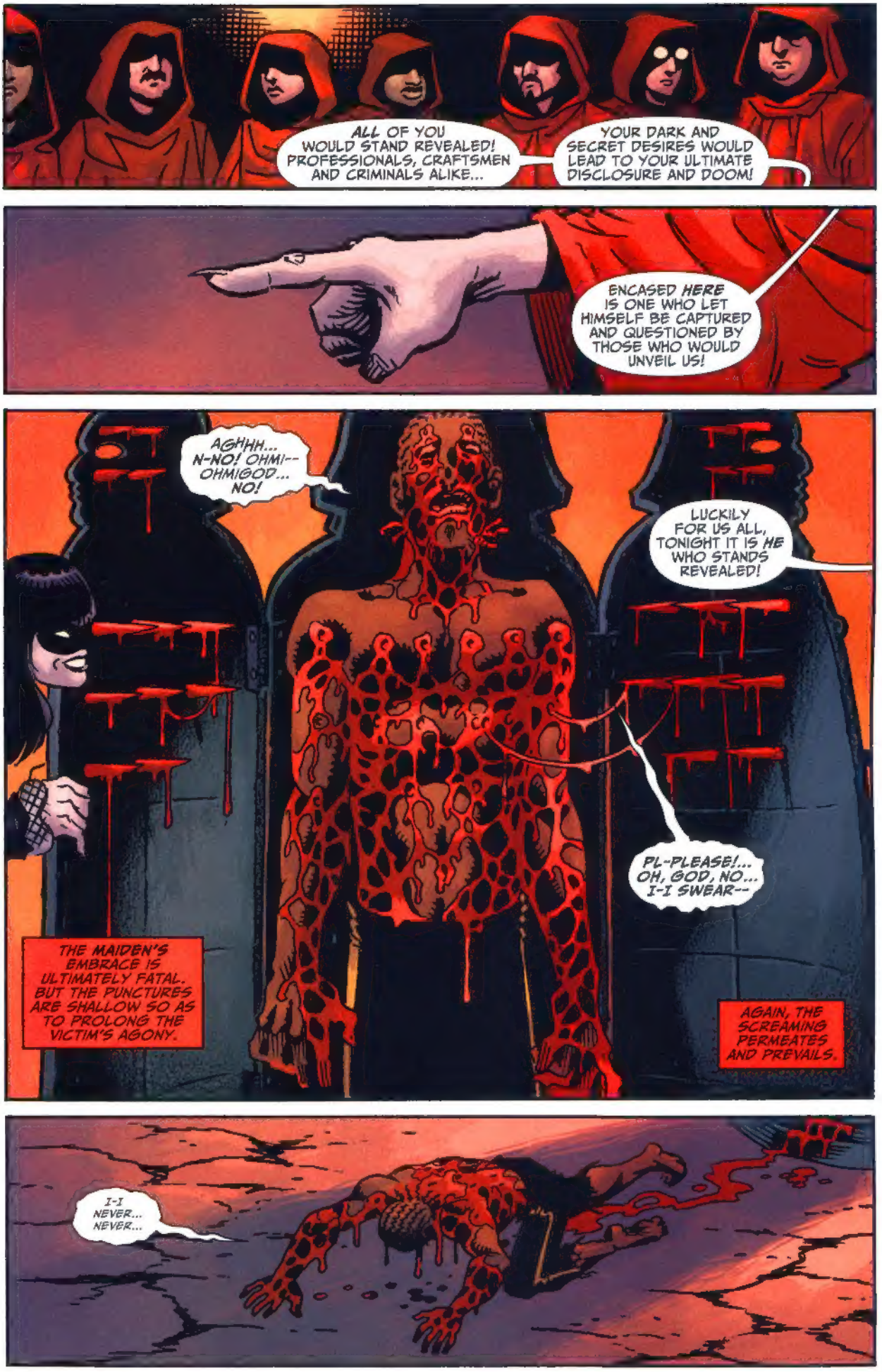
NICCOLAI HAS LONG UNDERSTOOD THE SEDUCTIVE ALLURE OF SCREAMING.
AAEEIIGH!
N-N-NOOO! I-I DON'T... DON'T...DIDN'T... PL-PLEEEEASE!!
AGGGH-- GH-GH--- GOD!
WHETHER TO ADVISE OR AROUSE, NONE CAN DENY SUCH THROATY DESPERATION.

MATT WAGNER·STORY & ART

DAVE STEWART ·COLORS· • ROB LEIGH ·LETTERS· • WAGNER & STEWART ·COVER· • BRANDON MONTCLARE ·ASST. EDITOR· • BOB SCHRECK ·EDITOR· • BATMAN CREATED BY BOB KANE


THE BROTHERHOOD THRIVES ON THIS ECHOING RAPTURE.
LONG HAVE I WARNED YOU ALL ON THE DANGERS OF EXPOSURE!
THE DAYLIGHT WORLD WILL NOT TOLERATE THE WAYS OF NOCTURNA'S LEGIONS.
N-NOOO! UNH...UGH... UNH--
IF THEY GAIN WHIFF OF OUR ACTIONS, THEY WILL SWARM TO EXTERMINATE US... BRAVENED BY THEIR STAKES AND THEIR SILVER.
AAAAGH!! PL-PLEASE...
ALL THAT I HAVE PROMISED YOU--THE LURE OF ETERNITY AND THE UTTER POWER OF PREDATION...
NOOO--!
...ALL WILL BE LOST IF WE ARE UNCOVERED BY THOSE WHO ARE LITTLE MORE THAN THE CHATTEL OF OUR SUSTENANCE!
STILL, HIS VOICE CUTS THROUGH THE WAILING DIN AND CAPTIVATES US ALL.

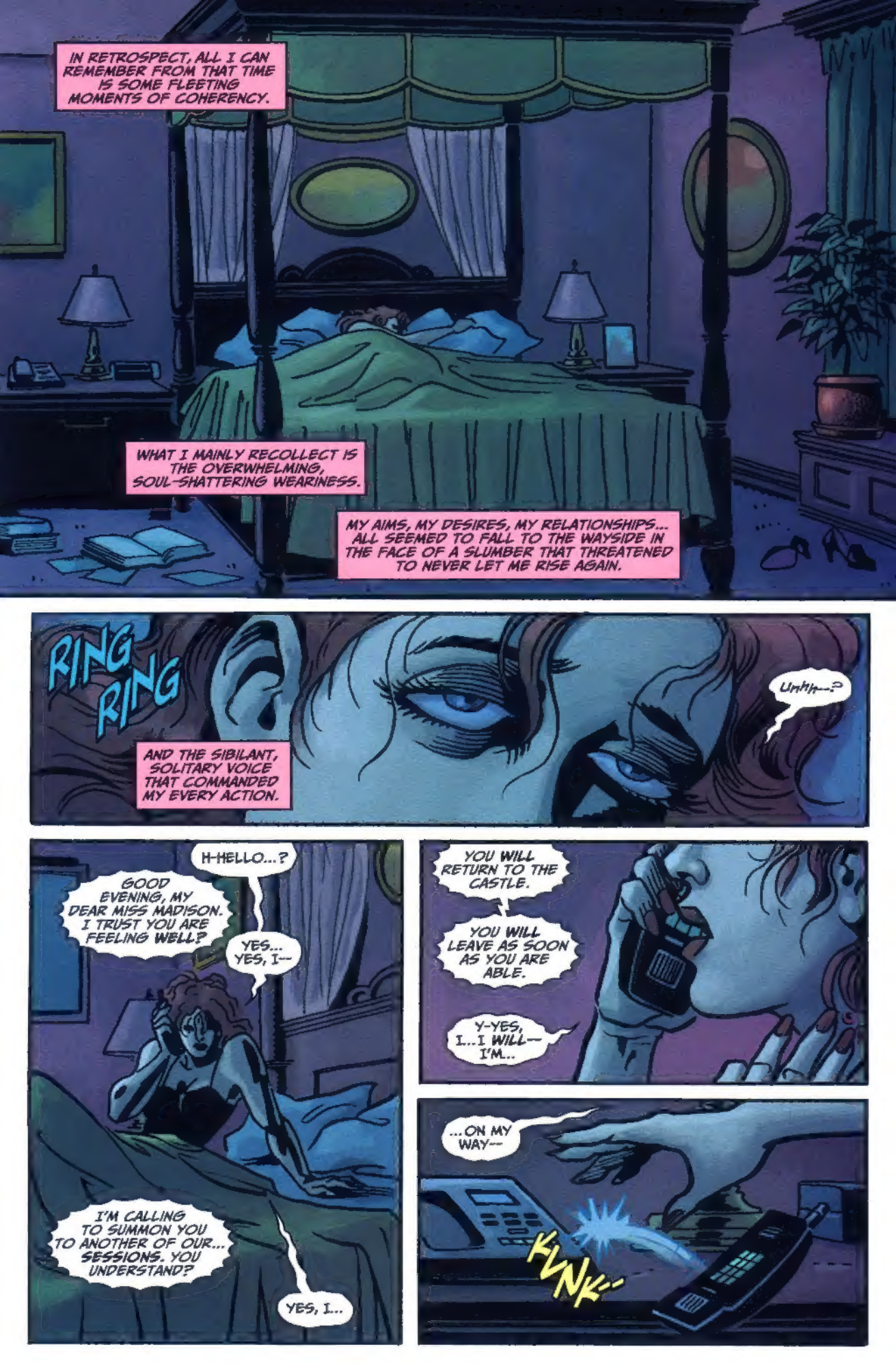

ALL OF YOU WOULD STAND REVEALED! PROFESSIONALS, CRAFTSMEN AND CRIMINALS ALIKE...
YOUR DARK AND SECRET DESIRES WOULD LEAD TO YOUR ULTIMATE DISCLOSURE AND DOOM!
ENCASED HERE IS ONE WHO LET HIMSELF BE CAPTURED AND QUESTIONED BY THOSE WHO WOULD UNVEIL US!
AGHHH... N-NO! OHMI-- OHMIGOD... NO!
LUCKILY FOR US ALL, TONIGHT IT IS HE WHO STANDS REVEALED!
PL-PLEASE!... OH, GOD, NO... I-I SWEAR--
THE MAIDEN'S EMBRACE IS ULTIMATELY FATAL. BUT THE PUNCTURES ARE SHALLOW SO AS TO PROLONG THE VICTIM'S AGONY.
AGAIN, THE SCREAMING PERMEATES AND PREVAILS.
I-I NEVER... NEVER...

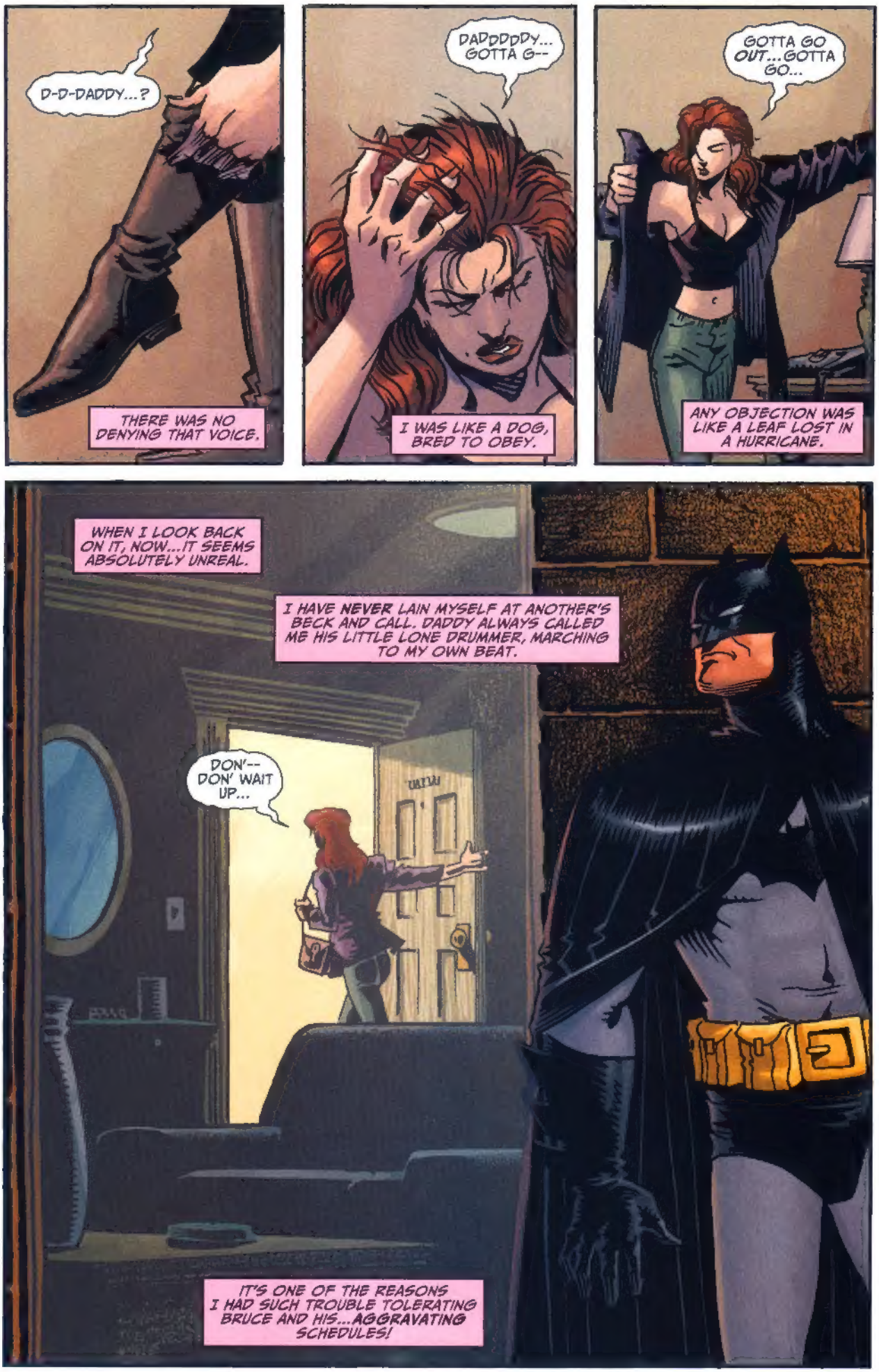
OH, GOD...
BEHOLD, ONE WHO HAD STOOD AT OUR SIDE AND PARTAKEN OF THE UNHOLY SACRAMENTS OF THE NIGHT.
NOW, HIS BLOOD IS SOILED AND UNWORTHY TO EVEN *SHARE* WITH THOSE WHO HAD BEEN HIS BRETHREN.
GRRRR
GGRRR
HIS FLUIDS AND FLESH ARE ONLY FIT FOR THE FODDER OF BEASTS.
N-N-N-N--
RRRAGGHH!
OOOFAAGH!
SUCH WILL BE THE FATE OF *ANY* WHO BETRAY THE BONDS OF OUR BROTHERHOOD.
THE NIGHT, YOU WILL FIND, IS AN UNFORGIVING MISTRESS.

Vampire.
Obviously, this is not a word, nor a concept, nor a deduction to which I come lightly.
It is only my fear for Julie and her safety that drives me to such fantastic speculation.
Still...
"When you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."
Vampire legendry exists in every culture, yet certain aspects of this case conform to the classic European variety.
If I am to combat such a menace, I will need extraordinary weaponry.
Garlic and religious icons seem to be mainly defensive measures.
Only one common component seems to harm such creatures.

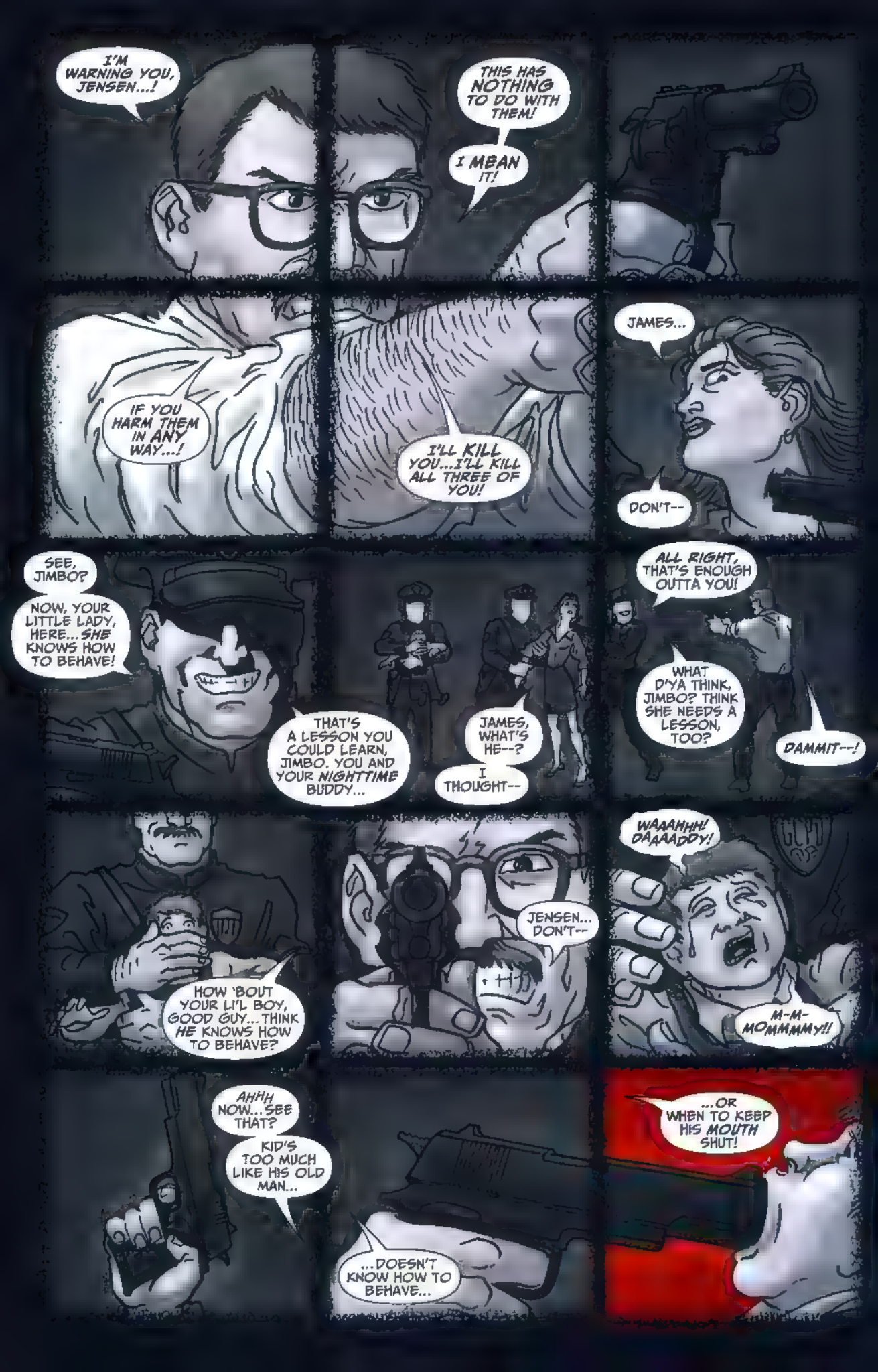
I SUPPOSE IT SAFE TO ASSUME THAT *THIS* IS WHAT BECAME OF THE CANDLESTICKS THAT HAVE GONE MISSING FROM THE EAST DINING ROOM?
SORRY, ALFRED. AS USUAL, I HAVE LITTLE TIME TO WASTE AND, AS TO THE JOB AT HAND...

...I NEEDED THE PUREST SILVER I COULD FIND.


IN RETROSPECT, ALL I CAN REMEMBER FROM THAT TIME IS SOME FLEETING MOMENTS OF COHERENCY.
WHAT I MAINLY RECOLLECT IS THE OVERWHELMING, SOUL-SHATTERING WEARINESS.
MY AIMS, MY DESIRES, MY RELATIONSHIPS... ALL SEEMED TO FALL TO THE WAYSIDE IN THE FACE OF A SLUMBER THAT THREATENED TO NEVER LET ME RISE AGAIN.
RING RING
Unhh--?
AND THE SIBILANT, SOLITARY VOICE THAT COMMANDED MY EVERY ACTION.
H-HELLO...?
GOOD EVENING, MY DEAR MISS MADISON. I TRUST YOU ARE FEELING WELL?
YES... YES, I--
I'M CALLING TO SUMMON YOU TO ANOTHER OF OUR... SESSIONS. YOU UNDERSTAND?
YES, I...
YOU WILL RETURN TO THE CASTLE.
YOU WILL LEAVE AS SOON AS YOU ARE ABLE.
Y-YES, I...I WILL-- I'M...
...ON MY WAY--
KLNK--


D-D-DADDY...?
THERE WAS NO DENYING THAT VOICE.
DADDDDDY... GOTTA G--
I WAS LIKE A DOG, BRED TO OBEY.
GOTTA GO OUT...GOTTA GO...
ANY OBJECTION WAS LIKE A LEAF LOST IN A HURRICANE.
WHEN I LOOK BACK ON IT, NOW...IT SEEMS ABSOLUTELY UNREAL.
I HAVE NEVER LAIN MYSELF AT ANOTHER'S BECK AND CALL. DADDY ALWAYS CALLED ME HIS LITTLE LONE DRUMMER, MARCHING TO MY OWN BEAT.
DON'-- DON' WAIT UP...
IT'S ONE OF THE REASONS I HAD SUCH TROUBLE TOLERATING BRUCE AND HIS...AGGRAVATING SCHEDULES!

It's after three a.m.
Where could she POSSIBLY be headed?
If she's on foot, I can shadow her easily enough.
If not, the bug I placed on her car will lead the way.
The legends speak of a vampire's preternatural control over their victims.
But why is she even still alive? Why hasn't she ended up as ravaged as all the others?
And how did she even fall prey to such a fate?
HE KNOWS MY NAME. AND, AS I FEARED...
...HE KNOWS WHERE I LIVE!

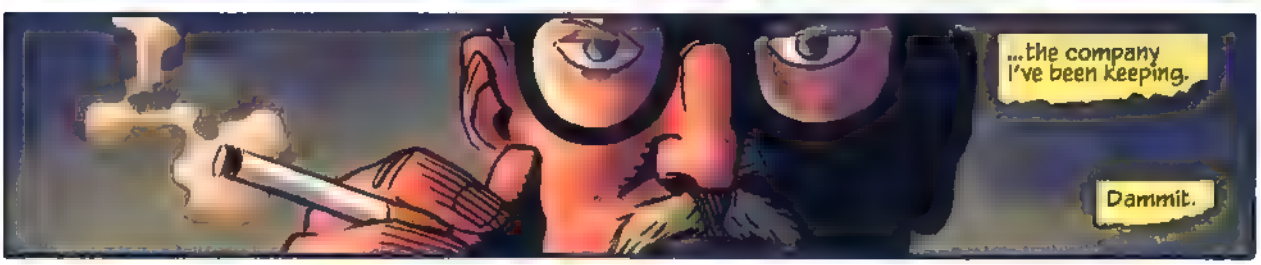

I'M WARNING YOU, JENSEN...!
THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THEM!
I MEAN IT!
IF YOU HARM THEM IN ANY WAY...!
I'LL KILL YOU...I'LL KILL ALL THREE OF YOU!
JAMES...
DON'T--
SEE, JIMBO?
NOW, YOUR LITTLE LADY, HERE... SHE KNOWS HOW TO BEHAVE!
THAT'S A LESSON YOU COULD LEARN, JIMBO. YOU AND YOUR NIGHTTIME BUDDY...
JAMES, WHAT'S HE--?
I THOUGHT--
ALL RIGHT, THAT'S ENOUGH OUTTA YOU!
WHAT D'YA THINK, JIMBO? THINK SHE NEEDS A LESSON, TOO?
DAMMIT--!
HOW 'BOUT YOUR LI'L BOY, GOOD GUY... THINK HE KNOWS HOW TO BEHAVE?
JENSEN... DON'T--
WAAAHHH! DAAAADDY!
M-M-MOMMMMY!!
AHHH NOW... SEE THAT?
KID'S TOO MUCH LIKE HIS OLD MAN...
...DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO BEHAVE...
...OR WHEN TO KEEP HIS MOUTH SHUT!

NNNAAGH!

WHAT'S THE MATTER? YOU ALL RIGHT?
YEAH... YEAH... S'JUST... JUST A DREAM.
GO BACK TO SLEEP.

Just a dream...
...doesn't stop me from going into little James' room and checking that he's still all in one piece.

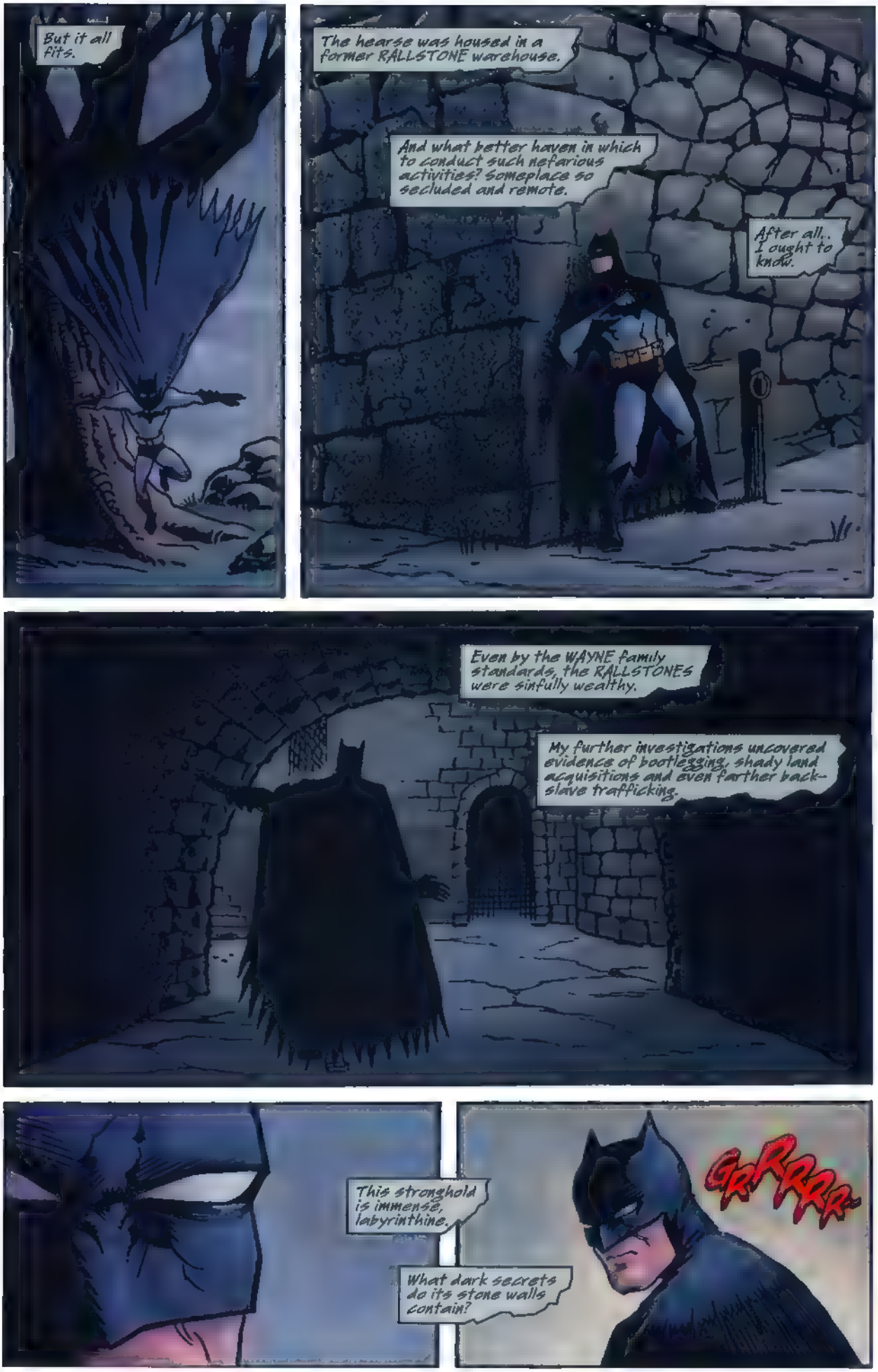
Barb would have a fit if she knew.
But, of course, I don't tell her a thing.
Can't implicate her in what I've been doing...


...the company I've been keeping.
Dammit.

WHEN I FIRST MET NICCOLAI, HE TOLD ME ABOUT HIS TIMES SPENT IN AMERICA.
ABOUT HIS PLANS TO ULTIMATELY CREATE A COMMUNITY OF VAMPIRES
HE RECOUNTED THE WAY IN WHICH HE WOULD RULE BY HIS SIDE AND THAT WE WOULD RHAPSODIZE IN THE SWEET, SILENT SYMPHONY OF THE MOON.
HE KNEW, EVEN THEN, THAT THIS WOULD BE A RISKY ENDEAVOR.
EVEN MORTALS' BLOODLINES HAD GROWN ANEMIC AND DULL.
WE MUST BE VERY WELCOMING IF WE HOPE TO SUCCEED
H-H'LO... DALA...
AHHH, JULIE... WE HAVE BEEN EXPECTING YOU!

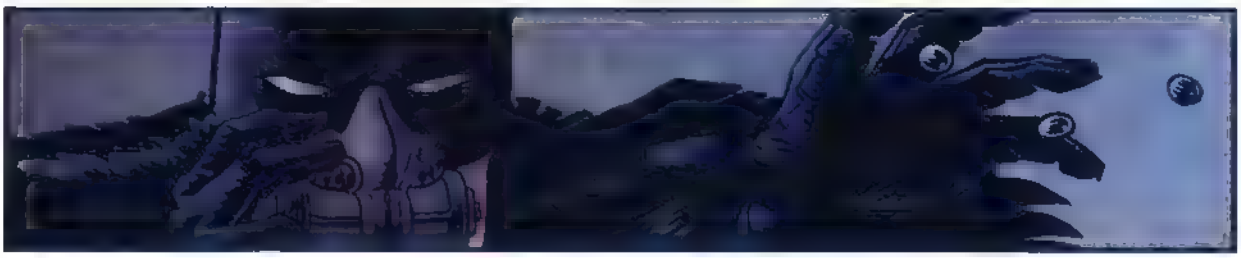
The old RALLSTONE castle...

In the terms of these massive estates... my neighbor.
I had thought this place long abandoned, decrepit by any description.


But it all fits.
The hearse was housed in a former RALLSTONE warehouse.
And what better haven in which to conduct such nefarious activities? Someplace so secluded and remote.
After all.. I ought to know.
Even by the WAYNE family standards, the RALLSTONES were sinfully wealthy.
My further investigations uncovered evidence of bootlegging, shady land acquisitions and even farther back- slave trafficking.
This stronghold is immense, labyrinthine.
What dark secrets do its stone walls contain?
GRRRRR-

GRRR--
Julie likes to tease me about how little I know of the latest popular trends.
Still, I doubt that keeping TIMBER WOLVES as household pets has recently come back into vogue.
GRRRR--
RRRAAGHH--
Unlike most wild animals, they're not in the least wary of a human presence.

GRR--
GRRRR--
They rapidly circle me, seemingly eager for a taste of my flesh.

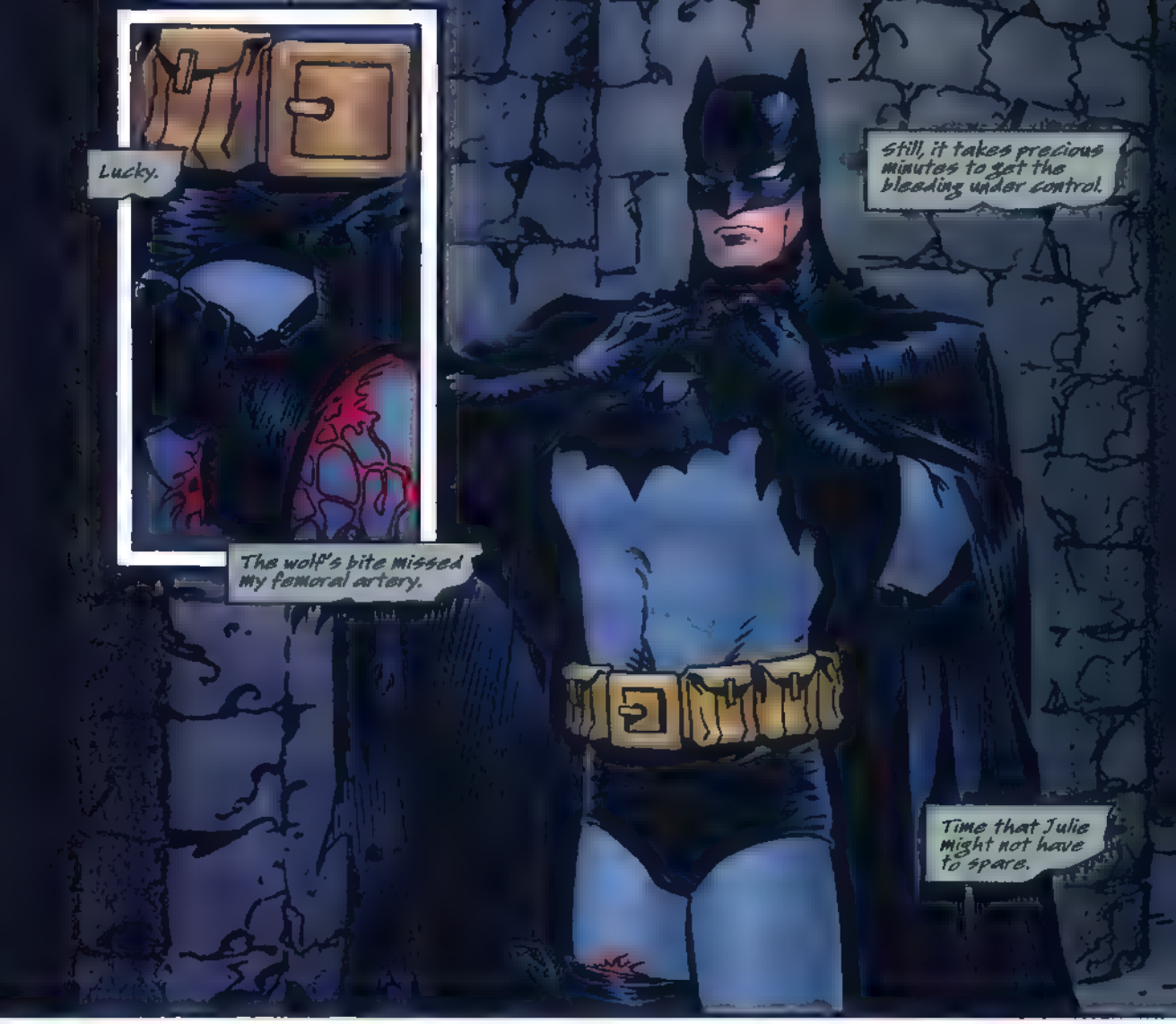


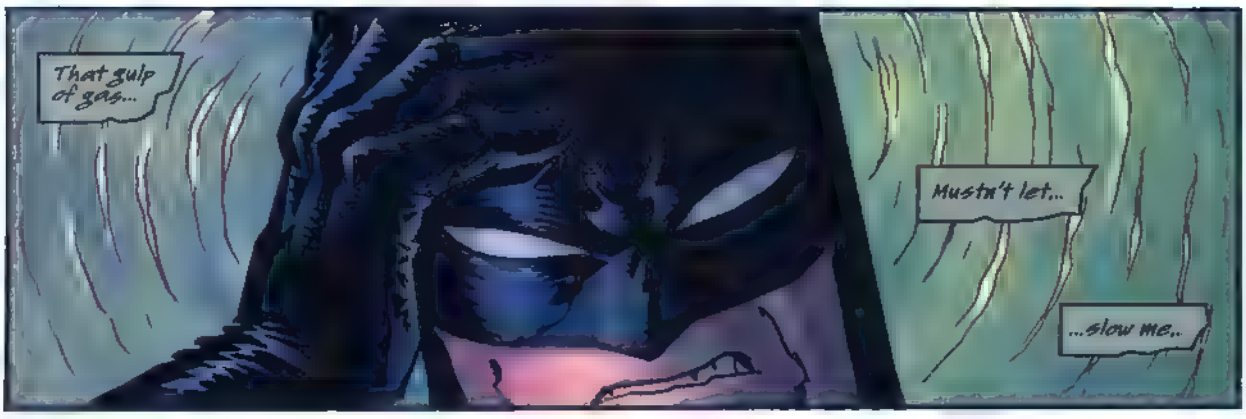
RRR AAGH
In the open like this, the gas will quickly dissipate.
RAAGH
Still, should slow them down just a bit--
YOWLP--
THAK
KRAK
SHHK

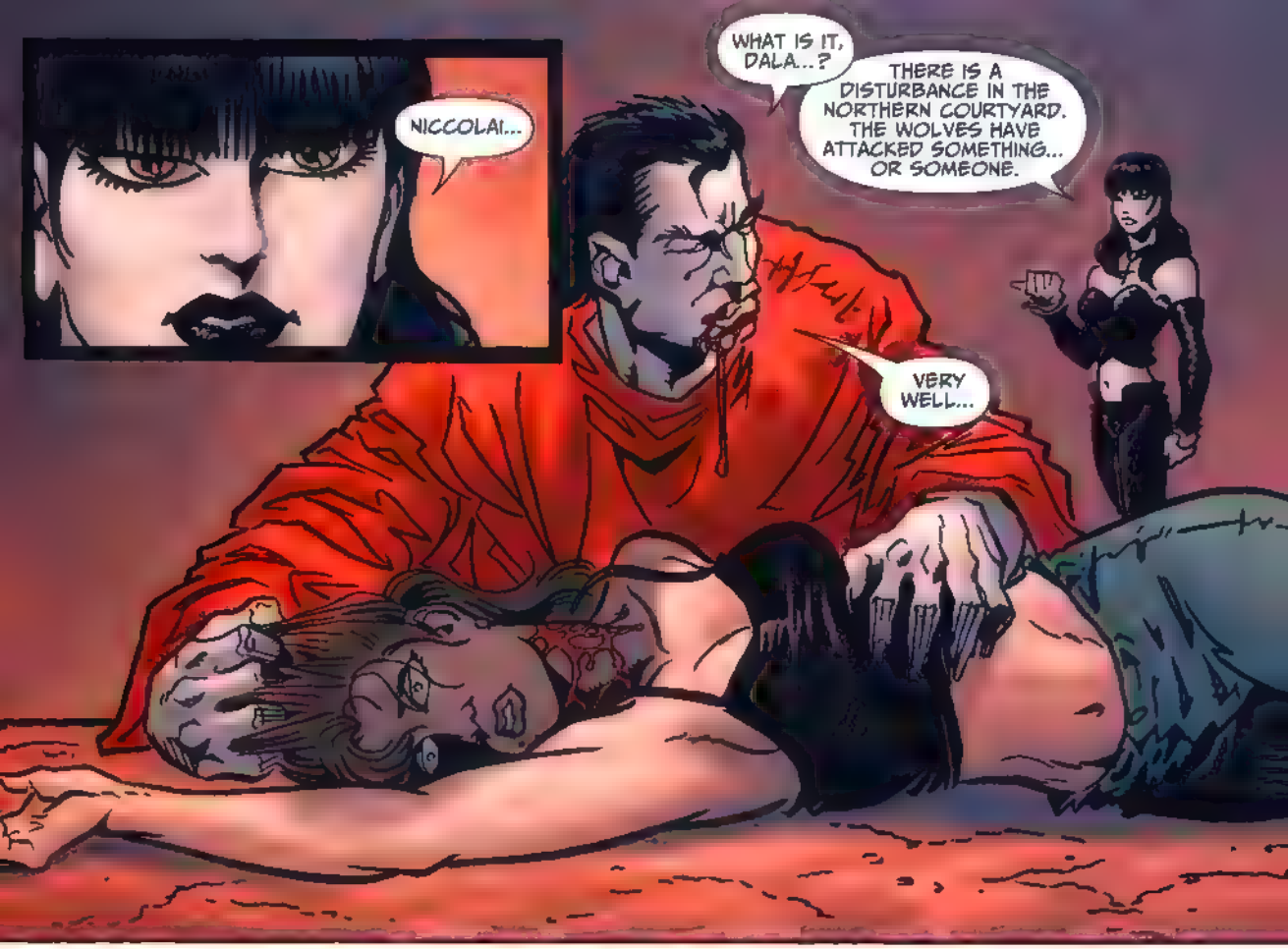
One down--
RRRRR-- SNAP-- RRRR ...whimper
RRRAGH--
YEAAAGH!!
Can't--
dislodge--
WAK
KRAK
Jaws--
like a vise--
KRAK
skull--
like granite.
SSSS
OOOWWUGH--

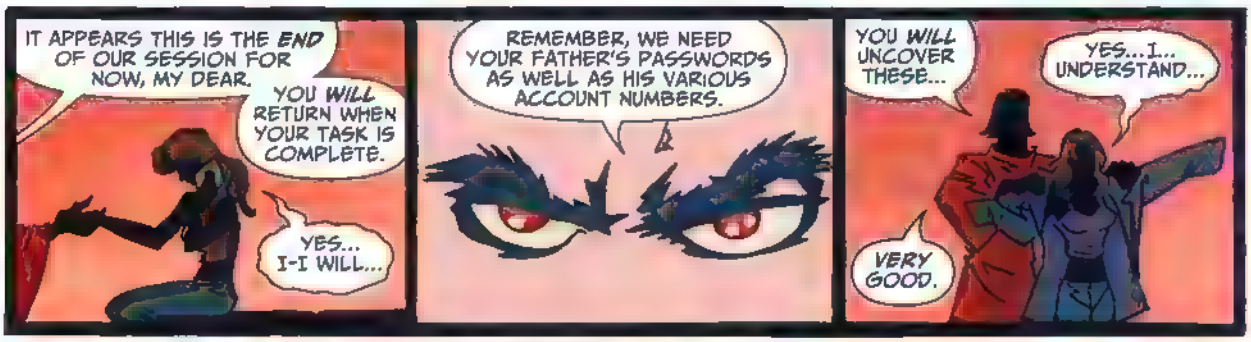
Pepper spray blinded it.
Caught a lungful of my own gas.
}KOFF-KOFF{ }KOFF-KOFF{
The beast is enraged, confused.
But it can smell the blood from my leg.
GRRR...
WHIMPH
No choice...

SLAM
WAM
KRAK
Finally...
...the spine gives in.
}pant--pant
}GASP(
}pant(


Lucky.
The wolf's bite missed my femoral artery.
Still, it takes precious minutes to get the bleeding under control.
Time that Julie might not have to spare.


That gulp of gas...
Mustn't let...
...slow me..


NICCOLAI...
WHAT IS IT, DALA...?
THERE IS A DISTURBANCE IN THE NORTHERN COURTYARD. THE WOLVES HAVE ATTACKED SOMETHING... OR SOMEONE.
VERY WELL...


IT APPEARS THIS IS THE *END* OF OUR SESSION FOR NOW, MY DEAR.
YOU *WILL* RETURN WHEN YOUR TASK IS COMPLETE.
YES... I-I WILL...
REMEMBER, WE NEED YOUR FATHER'S PASSWORDS AS WELL AS HIS VARIOUS ACCOUNT NUMBERS.
YOU *WILL* UNCOVER THESE...
YES...I... UNDERSTAND...
VERY GOOD.

DALA, ESCORT HER OUT AND THEN RETURN TO ME.
WE WILL SEE WHAT KIND OF *FOOL* HAS *DARED* WANDER INTO MY SANCTUM!

As expected, the castle appears to have been tenantless for years.
The stone walls are dank and musty.
Who would've built such an anachronistic monstrosity?
Unh--?
SHAK
The stairs--!
Too slick to grab hold--
UNG--!
THAK

A containment cell.
No windows or doors.
The stones shudder...
...as some grinding mechanism kicks into gear.
SHHHHK
THE WALLS!
They're CLOSING IN!
TO BE CONTINUED

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Timing is everything.

For those not in the know, we prepare these DC Nation pages about a month in advance. So, given the ever-changing climate in comics, I have, on occasion, written something for this page that at the time was fact, but unfortunately, by the time of publication, it was closer to fiction.

In an effort to put aside any conspiracy theories and thoughts of blatant misinformation, I wanted to take this time to identify some of my earlier announcements that have since become mistakes of the moment.

- Week 3. Got one of the artists wrong on the Superman Prequel books. The first official DC Nation mistake, but if it makes you feel any better, we solicited it wrong to the retailers too.
- Week 6. **INFINTE CRISIS**' Thin Green Line. With Phil and George feverishly working on other parts of the book, we actually turned to **Ivan Reis** to draw that page. In the end, it all looked great and came out on time. Imagine that!
- Week 10. Although it was a last-minute handwritten note, it will actually be **JG Jones** joining **Geoff Johns** on **ALL STAR BATGIRL**.
- Week 17. Tried to show our San Diego panel schedule in advance.. Boy, was that a bad idea. That schedule kept changing right up to convention time. It was right, then it was wrong, then right again, then wrong again. Thank goodness I had **Fletcher Chu Fong** there to point me in the right direction or else I would have gone to the wrong panels too.
- Week 30. Listed that one of our editors was newly promoted. Guess I just got the company wrong.

You know, I always notice the mistakes the most, but here, listed like that, it makes me feel a little bit better knowing that over the last 34 weeks, the number of things we might have misstated can be counted on one hand.

Keeping this column fun, fresh, informative and up to date is a huge challenge, but it is also our main goal. And we will keep trying to use this page to give you all the latest and greatest that DC has to offer. Hey, mistakes do happen, but they will never be as bad as standing in front of a crowded room and telling rabid DC fans that you wanted Nightwing dead. Still haven't lived that one down.

Oh, and for one last clarification, I never did get **Jann Jones** that alpaca she asked for, and no, it wasn't a mistake.

To be continued. dan didio

DC NATION

For a complete list of this week's titles, sneak peeks, breaking news and more, visit us at dccomics.com

THE HOT LIST THIS WEEK

GREEN ARROW #68

GREEN LANTERN CORPS #6

TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED #2

Next in...

BATMAN: THE MAD MONK #5

GAZE INTO THE EYES OF EVIL! Trapped in a dungeon of terror, Batman confronts his nightmarish past!

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